

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE MANDINKA EMPIRE

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Introduction

When we talk about the history of Africa, we should not just look into the basic history of great empires. The entire continent of Africa has had a rich history of struggles against colonial powers. When we talk about the history of the whole continent, it doesn't mean the history of struggle of 'known' empires but we must also look into the role played by numerous unknown empires and their leaders and then only we can present an intricate portrait of Africa's past. One such lesser known empire is the Mandinka Empire. It emerged as one of the strongest resistance movements against the European colonization but it was tragically short lived. One of the reasons was that the iconic leader of the Mandinkas made lots of efforts towards uniting the empire from within but he could not unite with the neighboring empires like the Tukolor Empire in their opposition against the foreign intrusion from the west. But he did create a state on the basis of Mandinka nationalism which played an important role strengthening the army and the society as well.

Samori Toure: The Iconic Leader

The Empire came to be established by its charismatic leader, Samori Toure who was a visionary and an able military ruler. According to sources "Samori Toure was brought into the world c. 1830 in Manyambaladugu (in the Konyan region of what is as of now southeastern Guinea), the offspring of Dyula agents. He grew up as West Africa was being changed through creating contacts and trade with the Europeans in things, skilled worker product and things". European trade made some African trading states rich. The trade weapons changed ordinary West African instances of battling and elevated the earnestness of conflicts, extending the amount of fatalities. As it so happens in his life, Ture changed over to Islam.

In 1848 CE, Samore's mother was gotten all through fight by Sere-Burlay, of the Cisse clan. Ensuing to getting sorted out his mother's chance, Samore went into organization to the Cisse, and sorted out some way to manage firearms. According to custom, he stayed & "seven years, seven months, seven days" preceding getting away with his mother.

He joined the Berete outfitted power, the foes of the Cisse, for quite a while preceding rejoining his family, the Kamara. Named Keletigui (war official) at Dyala in 1861 CE, Ture made a pledge to guarantee his kinfolk against both the Berete and the Cisse. He made a specialist equipped power and set close relations, very his kin and his dearest friends, in puts in of request.

In 1864 CE, El Hadj Umar Tall kicked the container; he had set up the powerful Toucouleur Area that managed the current of Niger. When the strength of the Trocouler states decrease, officials and neighborhood rulers contended to make states of their own. By 1867 CE, Ture was an evident war authority, with a military based at Sanankoro in the Guinea Great nations, on the Upper Milo, a Niger Stream feeder. Ture had two huge goals: to make a capable, undaunted engaging force furnished with current firearms, and to develop a consistent state.

By 1876 CE, Samore was acquiring breech-stacking rifles through the English region of Freetown in Sierra Leone. He vanquished the Buré gold mining area (as of now on the periphery among Mali and Guinea) to fortify his financial condition. By 1878 CE he was adequately ready to communicate himself faama (military top) of the Wassoulou Area and make Bissandugu as capital and start the political and business systems with the neighboring state Toucouleur.

In 1881 CE, after different fights, Ture ensured about manage the Dyula Trade centre of convergence of Kankan, on the upper Milo Stream. The main trade centre was Kankan for the trade kola nuts, and was generally sited to overpower the transportation paths all over. By 1881 CE, the Wassoulou Domain loosened up through the space of present-day Guinea and Mali, in view of what is as of now. Sierra Leone to northern Côte d'Ivoire.

Samore captured the tribal states and developed the relation in Sierra Leone with English traveller association and Fulle, inmate of Futa Jallon. The French began to stretch out in West Africa in the last piece of the 1870s CE, pushing eastward from Senegal to show up at the upper extents of the Nile in what is as of now Sudan. They attempted to drive southeast to interface up with their bases in Côte d'Ivoire. These exercises put them clearly into conflict with Ture.

In February 1882 CE, a French mission attacked one of Ture's militaries that were assaulting Keniera. Ture drove off the French; anyway he was terrified at the request and ability which their fighters coordinated.

He pushed toward dealing with the French severally. In any case, he stretched out southwestward to ensure a line of correspondence with Liberia. In January 1885 CE he sent a global place of refuge to Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone and a Crown Condition of the English, offering to put his domain under English protection. The English might not want to confront the French at the present time anyway they allowed Ture to buy enormous amounts of current repeating rifles.



Right when a 1885 CE French mission attacked for the capturing the Bure gold fields, Ture counterattacked. Parceling his military into three adaptable fragments, and executes the path like French correspondence and obliged them to pull out quickly.

By 1887 CE, Samori had a limited large number of thirty to thirty five thousand infantry, composed into separations and associations on the European model, and three thousand officers, in standard units of fifty each. Regardless, the French might not want to offer him a chance to set his position. Manhandling the uprisings of a couple of Ture's subject groups, who were animist and restricted Islam, the French continued wandering into his westernmost belongings. They obliged Ture to sign a couple of arrangements giving up a zone to them some place in the scope of 1886 CE and 1889 CE.

In Walk 1891 CE, a French force under Colonel Louis Archinard dispatched a prompt attack on Kankan. Understanding his fortifications could not stop French weapons, Touré began a skirmish of move. Disregarding wins against isolated French segments (for example at Dabadugu in September 1891 CE), Ture fail to push the French from the focal point of his domain. In June 1892 CE, Col. Archinard's replacement, Humbert, driving a little, all around gave intensity of picked men, gotten Ture's capital of Bissandugu. In another blow, the English had stopped contribution breech loaders to Ture according to the Brussels Show of 1890 CE.

Ture pushed his central command eastward, around the Bandama and Comoe Stream. He started a burned earth procedure, devastating each zone before he purged it. Disregarding the way that this move cut Ture off from Sierra Leone and Liberia, his last wellsprings of current weapons, it furthermore delayed French interest. The fall of other obstacle military, and particularly Babemba Traore at Sikasso, permitted the French wilderness equipped power to dispatch a concentrated assault against Toure. He was gotten September, 29, 1898 CE by the French officer Henri Gouraud and was ousted to Gabon. Samori Ture passed on in servitude on June 2, 1900 CE, following a scene of pneumonia. His entombment chamber is at the Camayanne Burial place, inside the nurseries of Conakry Impressive Mosque.

Mandinkan Army

As mentioned before, Toure's strong army played a crucial role in uniting the people and creating the Mandinkan Empire. Not only he became the head of the state but also declared himself as the commander in chief. By blending traditional methods with modern technology, he was able to create a superior and highly centralized army. Not only this, he further divided his army into highly specialized cavalry and infantry wings. Given his trader background, he by using his Dyula connections procured firearms by importing them from the east coast and was further able to modernize and strengthen his army. He even imported the modern quick loading rifles from Freetown's Sierra Leone port. Apart from this, he hired iron smiths from the neighboring areas, engaged them in making and repairing of "muzzle loading guns". He even established the Mandinka iron foundry for making and repairing guns and this later played a crucial role in their fight against the French in the 1880s and 1890s. In his pursuit to further strengthen his army in terms of numbers, the male captives were inducted in the army and not sold as slaves in the market. This not only increased the local population's loyalty and allegiance towards the state but towards Samori himself, who was now elevated to a position of utmost importance and a source of seeking legitimacy.

Mandinkan Economy

Samori played an important role in strengthening the economy. This was done by making use of his contacts as a trader and also with the help of family links. His family was engaged in "trade in gold dust from Bure and cattle from Futa Jalon". Also, his use of Dyula heritage to procure firearms from different parts has already been mentioned. All these not only strengthened the economy but gave a boost to the organization of army. His expansionist policies were also aimed at developing the economy. According to sources, "between 1865 and 1875, Samori conquered surrounding Dyula states and built up a powerful Mandinka kingdom. The unity which he established in the region eased trade and brought greater prosperity to the merchants". Even during late 1870s, he extended his conquests to include the Bure goldfields in the north and south of the upper Niger valley towards modern Bamako. "By the early 1880s, he had turned his trading kingdom into a huge empire, the third largest in Western Africa" according to many.

Rift Between the French and the Mandinkas:

"Between 1879 and 1881, the French began an aggressive policy of colonization in West Africa where they pushed towards the upper Niger, building fortifications between Senegal and Bamako. In the 1850s and 1860s, Governor Louis Faidherbe had extended French control up the Senegal valley to secure French trading interests and to forestall western expansion of Tukolor and the Mandinka empires". This was achieved by recruiting the Senegalese army which was highly disciplined and excelled in the use of modern weaponry from Europe. Among the principal opponents of French expansion in the west was the Mandinka Empire of Samori. Despite having extraordinary military skills, Samori opted for diplomacy rather than conflict. This shows that he was a smart statesman who went for deliberations rather than draining economic and financial resources in the first go. But this did not work.

The most dreaded opponent of French in the west was Samori Toure. As mentioned earlier, "he commanded an army of 30,000 men, mostly foot soldiers but also had an elite corps of cavalry and were well armed with muskets and rifles, imported from Sierra Leone or manufactured and repaired by his own Mandinka metal workers and smiths".



The treaty between Mandinkas and French was brokered in 1887 after some border clashes in the beginning in 1880s but this only was a temporary affair. The reason behind was to take over the boundary on the north eastern edge of Niger River which was under Samori's control. Along with tensions with the French colonial power, Samori faced additional challenges which weakened his control in the region. In the siege of Sikasso capital on the northeastern frontier, his army endured heavy losses. Also, there was an internal revolt against him when he attempted to forcibly convert his people to Islam which furthered weakened his position.

From the north, an invasion in 1891 by the French took everyone by surprise. To avoid any unnecessary bloodshed and his realization that his army was no match to the French artillery and machine guns made Samori to opt for a 'scorched earth' policy, which meant "tactical withdrawal from the capital Bissandugu". This did demoralize the local people along with his army but the abandonment had advantages like it led to shortage of supplies for the French army and they had to do away with the invasion in 1892. This shows Samori's farsightedness.

"Between 1892 and 1894, Samori shifted his empire to the east mainly to the northern borderlands of modern Cote de Ivoire and Ghana". But the move was not free from challenges. They faced internal opposition from the local population for now they were considered as foreign invaders. Also, the Asante which had come under the British in 1896 blocked their movement towards further east. Unable to procure a protectorate from the British, Samori was now left with no choice but to fight the French.

The army under the command of Samori fought valiantly given the constraints of primitive technology and shortage of arms supply. According to sources, "it was finally because of a famine which finally defeated Samori's troops in the mountains north of Liberia in 1898. Samori finally gave up to the French and was exiled to Gabon where he died at the age of 70 in 1900". This marked the end of one of the most stubborn resistances against European colonization and triumph of French colonialism.

Mandinkan Religion

One of the achievements of Samori was to integrate education with religion. He built several mosques and madarssas and promoted Muslim education. The main basis of his rule was the propagation of Islamic law and teachings, thus used Islam and not 'jihad' as the means to strengthen and unite his kingdom. We must keep in mind that Samori was himself a non Muslim and got converted to Islam some time in his youth. So, when he began to enforce his religious ideologies and forcibly started converting the Mandinkas to Islam, he was faced with internal revolt and dissent. Thus, we can say that the transition towards a unified religious set up was not a smooth one but was achieved with patience by Samori and a harmonious and unified society was created in which religion play a crucial role which in turn further made his position more legitimate and powerful.

Conclusion

Thus, in conclusion, we can say that "the state was strengthened by a unifying sense of Mandinka nationalism which recalled the glories of the ancient Malian empire". Samori Toure was a true statesman who organized the Mandinka people into one strong cohesive unit, based on the principles of equality, unity and brotherhood. The very organization of the army enabled him to wield his control over all the units and create an atmosphere of patriotism which helped them against fighting European colonialism. The society, economy and polity are still based on traditional principles but now these got blended with new ideas and views, thus gradually witnessed change.

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